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ABSTRACT

In a few years, the United States is going to have the largest number of teenagers it has ever had; at the same time, crime among teenagers is rising, and the recreational and learning activities and jobs that teenagers need for positive development are becoming scarcer in inner city and rural areas. Efforts in youth programs during the past 25 years reveal the following: (1) early childhood and adolescent programs often have strong positive effects, but these effects generally do not last into adulthood; (2) programs for older teenagers and young adults who have already exhibited behavioral and/or performance problems also often show good short-term effects, but only a very few achieve long-term impacts on social behavior and labor market performance; and (3) successful social intervention for young children and early teens is rooted in creating strong relationships with adults and in providing engaging and positive activities. Recommendations for the future include the following: (1) continue a steady and measured expansion of investment in early childhood programs, focusing on the quality and intensity of adult time spent with young children; (2) do not continue massive federally regulated job placement programs for older teens and young adults based solely on local poverty and employment rates, but rather use a work force development block grant strategy and encourage state investment in local organizations that can become brokers between poor communities and area employers; and (3) increase federal investment in building a stronger web of basic local supports for teenagers. Instead of complex, problem-oriented programs and services, public policy should encourage basic supports (sustained adult attention and guidance and a variety of positive activities) for young people. (Contains a list of Public/Private Ventures publications, with instructions and cost for ordering.) (KC)

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Public/Private Ventures

NEWS

Back to Basics: A New/Old Direction for Youth Policy

This essay by P/PV president Gary Walker is based on a speech given at The Aspen Institute's Congressional Conference on Preparing Youth for the 21st Century on February 19, 1996.

The warning signals are clear:

- In a few years, the United States is going to have the largest number of teenagers it's ever had.
- While crime is generally down in many urban and suburban areas, it has spiked sharply over the past few years for teenagers. Especially younger ones.
- The recreational and learning activities and jobs that teenagers need in order to develop soundly are becoming scarcer in the very inner city and rural areas where much of the bulge in teens will be located. Thus, as youth's numbers rise, there will be—under current conditions and trends—even fewer positive activities to engage them during non-school hours.

One of the country's leading criminologists, P/PV board member John DiIulio, Jr., recently said in a *Time* magazine interview that if we do nothing about these signals, the near-term outcome is obvious: even higher rates of teenage crime, with all its attendant social reverberations and costs.

It's obvious that local community crime control strategies need to be sharpened and strengthened, as many localities are already doing. But will these approaches do the job?

Teenagers are very susceptible to what their peers are doing, and tend not to calculate the consequences of their actions. So it is unlikely that a focus solely on penalties will stem the coming tide of teenage crime.

What else can be done? A tight federal budget, and an electorate more skeptical than ever of government effectiveness in solving tough social problems, make new large-scale federal initiatives an unlikely response.

The evidence we have from special initiatives by the federal government and philanthropies over the past 25 years indicates no known "programs" that will significantly and durably resolve the growing problem. So is this the time to admit that the federal government has no role and no reason to spend any more taxpayer dollars confronting this issue? That states, localities, families and the voluntary sector will just have to do the best they can?

I think the answer to these questions is "no." Not because I am an optimist—but because lessons from the past quarter century point in some promising directions. And because common sense and current realities indicate that these promising directions are most likely to be effective if all levels of government—as well as communities, families and the voluntary sector—play an appropriate role.

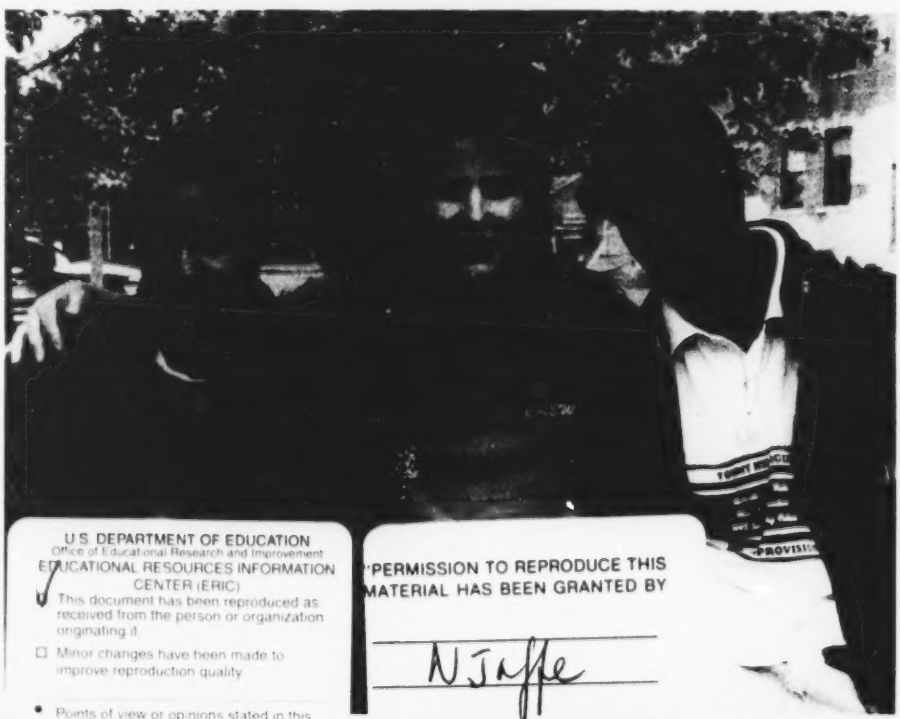

Photo by Maggie Hopp

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Lessons from the Past

What do the efforts of the past 25 years teach us?

1. Early childhood and adolescent programs often have strong positive effects—but these effects generally don't last into adulthood.

Early childhood has been the major focus of our country's special public initiatives to help its youth, especially those living in poor communities and families. Head Start is the most prominent example.

Research on Head Start and similar programs show a range of positive effects on children and their families. But those effects do not endure. Some years after the special program experience has ended, children who were in the programs behave and perform like children who were never enrolled.

Although there are far fewer special programs for adolescents, we see the same results. P/PV's STEP (Summer Training and Education Program) demonstration is the notable example: STEP provided two consecutive summers

> How does successful human development proceed for all of us? In bits and pieces, not once and forever.

of paid part-time jobs, remedial education and life skills classes to low-income 14- and 15-year-olds who were beginning to fall behind in school. Participating youth had powerful and immediate positive educational effects from their summer experiences, as compared with a control group of similar youth not taking part in STEP.

But several years later, those effects had disappeared—STEP youth performed no better in school than their non-STEP peers, and had similar dropout and teen pregnancy rates.

A common expectation of Americans across the political spectrum was that interventions like Head Start and STEP would change, *permanently*, the social behavior, academic performance and career trajectory of the participating youngsters. With that high expectation, what is most remembered about the research on Head Start, STEP and similar initiatives is not the positive effects they did achieve but that they didn't solve the problem once and for all. For some policymakers, the conclusion has been that these programs simply "don't work."

In developmental terms, however, they did and do work. They improve behavior and performance significantly during the period in which youth participate and for a while thereafter. That is how successful human development proceeds for all of us: in bits and pieces, not once and forever. But improvements cannot be sustained in an environment with few other supports and opportunities to build on gains that are made.

2. Programs for older teenagers and young adults who have already exhibited behavioral and/or performance problems also often show good short-term effects. However, only a very few achieve long-term impacts on social behavior and labor market performance.

The other major focus of our country's special public initiatives for poor youth jumps from early childhood to the late teens and early 20s—young adults who have already exhibited social behavior, school performance or labor market problems.

Programs for these young people typically offer social services (like counseling and housing assistance), educational remediation of some type, and work experience and/or career counseling and/or job placement services.

Many of these programs show positive short-term effects on crime, education, income, etc., while the youth are in the program. Several—such as youth service corps—have been shown to produce short-term benefits that outweigh their costs. However, because they are typically more expensive, and the young people being helped are much closer to adulthood, our expectations for improved behavior and performance over the long term are even higher for these programs than they are for those serving young children and adolescents.

3. *Successful social intervention for young children and early teens is rooted in creating strong relationships with adults, and in providing engaging and positive activities. Successful social intervention for older teens and young adults is rooted in these same two elements, and requires local organizations that have strong relationships with local employers.*

Over the past 25 years, we've been so focused on creating interventions to solve our latest high-profile "social problem"—whether it be drugs, crime, the school dropout rate, poor educational performance or teen pregnancy—and so intent on getting results from short-term, quick-fix "programs" that we've overlooked the common thread running through the successes we have had: enduring relationships between youth and adults; the availability of a variety of positive recreational, work and community service activities; and reliable help in gaining initial access to employers.

In short, the past tells us, first, to have realistic expectations about the progress that different age groups can make; and second, to stick to basics: adult caring and guidance, plenty of legitimate things to do in a youth's spare time, and real help in connecting with employers. This is the stuff of successful human, citizen and worker development. Combined with better policing strategies and more appropriate penalties, this is how not only to prevent the coming teenage crime wave, but to develop effective citizens and productive workers.

> Stick to basics: adult caring and guidance, plenty of legitimate things to do in a youth's spare time, and real help in connecting to employers. This is the stuff of successful human, citizen and worker development.

Yet the long-term results have been mostly unimpressive and occasionally negative; even when positive, they are rarely dramatically so. These largely poor long-term outcomes have caused many Americans and their elected representatives to think that older youth who are poor, not doing well in (or not in) school, and who have already been in trouble with the law, are simply beyond help—or at least beyond the help of public policy. I disagree.

The fact is that we simply had unrealistic expectations of our programs for young children, adolescents and youth. We have only been experimenting with public policy in this area for 25 years—and our early hopes were understandably naive. It is our fear of having to fulfill, through public policy and at public cost, the *ongoing* needs of poor youth that causes us to shy away from these programs and their implications—not their "failure."

It is worth remembering that almost all these programs —for *all* age groups—had very positive effects while youth were in them, and for a short while thereafter. In short, almost all achieved positive developmental outcomes. And a *few* programs for young adults were able to achieve longer-term employment and income effects—enduring changes in life's trajectory.

I believe that a closer examination of those positive gains reveals a lesson that holds promise for a different approach to youth policy than we have taken over the past 25 years—one that is politically, financially and operationally feasible. Specifically:

Common Sense and Current Realities

This analysis raises two fundamental questions:

- Why didn't more programs figure this out and then produce better results?
- What does it have to do with public policy, since the basics that are needed are local and private in nature? Let communities, families, volunteers and nonprofits get on with it.

The answer to the first question is that many local programs *did* figure it out. That's why the in-program and short-term effects of so many interventions are so consistently good.

But the rules governing the administration of public funding aimed for quick, total solutions—not steady progress. The basic approach was to provide more and more "services" to address youth's discrete "problems"—the adults involved spent most of their time coordinating with adults in other agencies about what services a youth needed to "fix" his or her problems. Developing and sustaining simple, positive relationships with adults was never a goal, and thus was never encouraged or sustained by public monies or rules.

Likewise, under most government funding regulations, creating positive activities that would attract and engage youth has generally been viewed as "soft," and not sufficiently aimed at solving youth's "problems." The fun Congress poked at "midnight basketball" during last year's budget debates only reflects the prevailing attitude of most publicly funded youth programs of the past 25 years. Better to spend money on counseling kids about drugs than to make sure they have better ways to use their free time.

Creating positive activities that would attract and engage youth has generally been viewed as "soft," and not sufficiently aimed at solving youth's "problems."

Our desire for quick solutions led us not to invest in local organizations that could, over time, develop stable and trusting relationships with employers; rather, we invested in "job programs" that came, changed and went with a rapidity that did not promote relationships between strong local organizations and employers.

In short, under the guise of strict regulation of the use of public funds in social programs, we ensured that strong and enduring relationships with adults and employers, and plenty of positive activities in non-school hours, were *not* the focus of our youth policy. We wanted *problems solved*, and in our rush, we overlooked the fact that the best way to do that is to *help youth develop through positive relationships and activities.*

What does all this have to do with public policy? The answer is simply that public policy exists to address critical issues that cannot be effectively addressed privately. And it is clear that the social and economic realities of the 1990s make it increasingly difficult for parents and communities —especially poor ones—to provide all the basic elements necessary for a child's successful development as citizen and worker.

In most two-parent and single-parent families today, all the adults in the household work outside the home. Under budget pressures, schools and communities drop after-school and weekend recreational activities in order to finance classroom activities. Light industry and other employers with decent entry-level jobs have moved out of

cities to the suburbs, where they can't be reached by a city dweller without a car. No one from inner-city neighborhoods works there, so there are no natural connections to job referrals for young adults trying to get a start in the labor market. And at the same time, we tell our youth that they must bring more skills than ever before to the rapidly changing workplace if they are to succeed; even if they do succeed, they must be prepared in their lifetimes to change careers five or six times.

Imagine being a young person whose parents work; whose school has cut back on non-academic activities; whose neighborhood and adjoining areas have few businesses and employers, and few areas for teens to safely gather; who knows few adults with connections to employers; and who hears, as he or she reaches the mid-teen years, that the job world offers little security and is getting tougher to succeed in. The likelihood of success is of course lower for such a youth than for one growing up in a more prosperous area—regardless of his or her intelligence, good intent and parental concern.

> The teenage years are the time when serious problems take serious root and flourish (drugs, crime, illegitimacy)—and the time when intervention can be most significant in a young person's life.

It is not possible that totally private action will address all these issues for young people, except in the most affluent communities. Government and public policy must have a role if our current teenagers are to become productive, law-abiding citizens.

A Modest Proposal

I believe it is possible to increase essential supports for our youth—and thus significantly reduce teenage crime, and other youthful behavior and performance problems—without setting up a vast new governmental program and bureaucracy, and without ravaging taxpayers' wallets.

The overall strategy would have three elements:

1. Continue a steady and measured expansion of our investment in early childhood programs. Do not expect long-term outcomes from them, but do expect strong immediate and short-term improvements. These programs are relatively easy to monitor for management and quality-control purposes. Focus operationally on the quality and intensity of adult time spent with the young children.

2. Do not continue massive federally regulated job placement programs for older teens and young adults based solely on local poverty and employment rates. Rather, use a work force development block grant strategy, and let states have broad discretion on how that money is used. Use limited federally controlled monies as leverage/incentive funds:

- To encourage state investment in local organizations (profit or nonprofit) whose goal is to become brokers between poor communities and area employers;
- To provide accurate information and assistance on how that goal has been accomplished elsewhere (there are several notable successes); and
- To demonstrate and assess the effectiveness of these organizations.

3. Most important, increase federal investment in building a stronger web of basic local supports for teenagers. In the past, we have focused our public youth policy on young children and older teens, largely ignoring younger teenagers.

It was an understandable choice, given our early assumption that social problems could either be prevented quickly (thus early childhood) or solved quickly (thus older teens and young adults, when problems are greatest). But we were wrong. Problems, like humans, develop.

The teenage years are the time when serious problems take serious root and flourish (drugs, crime, illegitimacy)—and the time when intervention can be most significant in a young person's life. For those are the very years when young people begin to "go public"—beginning to move away from their homes and parents; exploring their independence; shaping their attitudes toward and relationships with outside institutions, their community and the larger society. They are open to outside influence.

Complex problem-oriented programs and services are not the answer. It is basic supports—sustained adult attention and guidance, and a variety of positive activities—that youth most need.

Fortunately, there are a wide variety of organizations that provide these basic supports. Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Clubs, Y's, local organizations like Brooklyn's *El Puente*—these and many others have, over the past 25 years, *not* pursued the problem-oriented, quick-fix programming of public policy, but have stuck to the basics.

They are effective. For example, P/PV's recently completed control group study of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program found it produced substantial reductions in first-time drug use, school absenteeism and fighting. And these results came not from tutoring, anti-drug counseling or other problem-focused services, but from providing adult friendship and guidance on a regular and intensive basis.

To a significant degree, we have in place the private infrastructure needed to fill in this missing piece of our country's effort to assist its young people, and to reduce their antisocial behavior. But it cannot expand to the scale required by voluntary contributions alone. It requires a public commitment to our teenagers, and public support to expand these privately run organizations.

An Opportune Time for Change

Times of uncertainty and upheaval are also times of opportunity. The opportunity here is to admit that our previous policy approach to youth was too problem-focused, with unrealistic expectations and without a rudder—an approach that shifted as our perception of the problem shifted. We also ignored the very age group—teenagers—for whom a strong public policy could be most useful.

Every day, we hear about the economic and social forces that are changing American personal and working lives so dramatically. We likewise need a dramatic rethinking of our social policy toward youth, one that will use the tool of public policy to ensure that, amidst those larger changes, our youth are getting the basics they need to become the citizens America needs.

Assessing Program Quality

P/PV has crafted a tool to measure how well programs provide youth with developmental opportunities. Our recently published Urban Corps Assessment Package (URCAP) Manual is a technical report for researchers, but we hope to distill and repackage the information to make it more accessible to operators of corps and other programs who want to understand variations in program outcomes and adjust their programming.

The Manual's survey forms, questionnaires and scales were developed and tested by corps involved in P/PV's Urban Corps Expansion Project (UCEP) and by the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, but they can easily be adapted to other types of programs. The measurement tools are a survey of participants, a survey of staff, staff reports on participants, and reports by the director on all the staff.

The scales provide evaluators with quantitative measures of youth's background, their experience in the program and with the staff, staff's attitudes and behavior toward the youth, the culture and climate of the program, and the quality of the staff as assessed by the director.

Copies of the URCAP Manual are now available for $15 (see back page of this newsletter), and publication of a version for program staff will be announced later this year.

P/PV's Research Advisory Committee Welcomes Three New Members

P/PV has named **Marta Tienda** of the Population Research Center as the first chairperson of the Research Advisory Committee, and instituted a rotation system to allow the addition of three new members.

Ronald Ferguson, lecturer on public policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and senior research associate at Harvard's Malcolm Weiner Center for Social Policy Research, is a frequently published expert on mentoring and on issues involving young black males. Dr. Ferguson, who holds a Ph.D. in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has worked with P/PV on several projects, including Community Ecology and YouthBuild.

Alan Kreuger, professor of economics and public policy at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, served as chief economist at the U.S. Department of Labor in 1994. Dr. Kreuger (Ph.D. in economics from Harvard University) is an experienced economics editor who co-authored *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage*, published in 1995.

Katherine Newman, who holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley, is the author of several award-winning books on the urban experience, including 1993's *Declining Fortunes: The Withering of the American Dream*. Dr. Newman, a long-time professor of anthropology at Columbia University, recently became a professor of public policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Rotating off the Advisory Committee are Henry Levin of Stanford University and Anita Summers of the University of Pennsylvania. Both had served since formation of the Committee in 1987.

Recent Grants and Contracts

Community Change for Youth Development:
$1 million over three years from The Annie E. Casey Foundation; $400,000 over one year from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation; $150,000 over three years from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and $50,000 from the Merck Family Fund to conduct the demonstration.

The Experience Corps:
$200,000 over two years from The Retirement Research Foundation for research, management, training and technical assistance for the Senior Corps Demonstration.

Study of Youth Sports:
$67,500 planning grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund to study the potential of sports in youth programming.

Resources for Change:
$50,000 over six months from The Pinkerton Foundation to support the New York City Professional Development and Capacity-Building Project.

Bridges to Work:
$50,000 over four months from The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Employer/School-to-Work:
$25,000 over three months from The Pew Charitable Trusts to assess the implications of employer involvement in school-to-work programming.

General Support:
$25,000 over 25 months from AT&T Corporation to support a two-pronged initiative to increase the visibility of youth issues at the state level.

Publications

To order P/PV publications, mark the item(s) you want, tear off or photocopy this page, and send it with your payment to P/PV at the address below. Executive summaries, when available, are $1. If you wish to add names to our mailing list, correct an address, request a full publications list, or inquire about P/PV, please contact the Communications Department.

The Urban Corps Assessment Package (URCAP) Manual by James P. Connell, Jean Baldwin Grossman and Nancy L. Resch. (86 pages, September 1995) $15.00

Launching AmeriCorps: First-Year Implementation of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 by Thomas J. Smith and Linda Z. Jucovy, with Liz Alperin Solms, Rachel Baker, Kathryn Furano and Joseph P. Tierney. (57 pages, June 1995) Executive Summary available $7.50

The Plain Talk Planning Year: Mobilizing Communities to Change. A Report Prepared for The Annie E. Casey Foundation by Lauren J. Kotloff, Phoebe A. Roaf and Michelle Alberti Gambone. (69 pages, Spring 1995) Executive Summary available $3.00

Skills, Standards and Entry Level Work: Elements of a Strategy for Youth Employability Development by Keith MacAllum and Patricia Ma; prepared for and published by the U.S. Department of Labor and available from P/PV. (74 pages, 1995) . . $6.00

Mentoring in the Juvenile Justice System: Findings from Two Pilot Programs by Crystal A. Mecartney, Melanie B. Styles and Kristine V. Morrow. (74 pages, Winter 1994) $6.00

Seniors in National and Community Service: A Report Prepared for The Commonwealth Fund's Americans Over 55 At Work Program by Marc Freedman. (79 pages, April 1994) Executive Summary available $6.00

Young Unwed Fathers: Report from the Field by Mary Achatz and Crystal A. MacAllum. (104 pages, Spring 1994) $6.00

Replication: A Strategy to Improve the Delivery of Education and Job Training Programs by Richard H. de Lone. (50 pages, Summer 1990, reprinted 1995) $7.00

Over the Horizon: Jobs in the Suburbs of Major Metropolitan Areas, background paper for Bridges to Work project by Mark Alan Hughes. (58 pages, Winter 1993, reprinted 1996) $3.00

Big Brothers Big Sisters Research

Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters by Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman with Nancy L. Resch. (64 pages, November 1995) Executive Summary available $7.50

Building Relationships With Youth in Program Settings: A Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters by Kristine V. Morrow and Melanie B. Styles. (126 pages, May 1995) Executive Summary available $7.50

Big Brothers/Big Sisters: A Study of Volunteer Recruitment and Screening by Phoebe A. Roaf, Joseph P. Tierney and Danista E.I. Hunte. (48 pages, Fall 1994) $6.00

Big Brothers/Big Sisters: A Study of Program Practices by Kathryn Furano, Phoebe A. Roaf, Melanie B. Styles and Alvia Y. Branch. (66 pages, Winter 1993) $6.00

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